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ABSTRACT

During the academic year 1983-84, Drexel University instituted a new policy requiring all incoming students to have access to a microcomputer. The computer chosen to fulfill this requirement was the Macintosh from Apple Computer, Inc. This paper provides a brief description of the process undertaken to select the appropriate computer (i.e., specifications, vendor considerations, computer availability) and a more detailed description of the method of distribution to students once the first shipment (2,000 units) of Macintoshs arrived on campus in February 1984. Among the topics covered are the task of delivering both the hardware and accompanying software to students, assignment of pick-up times, steps in the distribution procedure, and repair requests received during the distribution period. (THC)

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Machine Distribution

Drexel University

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During the academic year 1983-84 Drexel University instituted a new policy requiring that all incoming students have personal access to a microcomputer. The computer chosen to fulfill this requirement was the Macintosh™ from Apple Computer Co.

To select this computer, a faculty committee was formed to draw up the specifications necessary for a computer that could serve the needs of students in all disciplines within the University. With these specifications, and the knowledge that students could not be expected to pay much more than an additional $1,000 in order to meet the new requirement, University administrators sought a vendor with a reputation for reliable products that could produce a machine to meet Drexel's specifications and still be acceptably priced. The machine that clearly stood above all the rest in meeting these criteria was Apple's Macintosh, which, unfortunately, would not be ready for delivery until early 1984. Because this machine was so perfectly suited to Drexel's needs, the decision was made to choose the Macintosh even though this meant computers could not be introduced on campus until early 1984.

The Macintosh was not publicly announced until January 24, 1984, and Drexel did not receive its first shipment (2,000 units) until the last week in February. This shipment, unfortunately, coincided with the end of the Winter term. One week was taken for check-out of the machines (see "Machine Check-Out," A 84-12 in this Working Paper series), so that only one week remained in the Winter term when the machines were ready for distribution. Project staff debated as to whether or not it would be better to distribute now or wait until the beginning of the next term. The obvious disadvantage of immediate distribution was that term paper preparation and studying for exams could be disrupted. The advantage was that students could experiment with the Macintoshes during the mid-term break. The decision was made to set up Macintosh access areas and print stations and to distribute machines to students during that last week of the term. This seems to have been the correct decision, as a very large number of the students returned from the Spring break with a good working knowledge of the Macintosh. Also, many had played out the addiction of their first encounters with the machine so they were able to

put down their "mice" and do some other work when the Spring term began. This fact alone would have justified the decision to distribute before Spring break.

The task of delivering both the hardware and accompanying software to 1,800 students, all with unique schedules, during a brief, one week period required a good deal of planning and preparation. This task was, however, accomplished smoothly and without any apparent difficulties despite the fact that winter weather was still upon us. Although the exact date of distribution was not determined until a few days before it actually took place, detailed planning had been going on for six months. Every step of the distribution procedure, from selection of a pick-up time to student transportation from the delivery point had all been carefully analyzed and specified. Everyone who would be involved (members of the Microcomputing Program's Equipment Support Group, personnel from the Comptroller's Office, campus security, and additional staff brought in from other parts of the University staff) knew precisely what their responsibilities would be. A brief description of those procedures is presented below. A schematic of the distribution flow is attached to the end of this document.

Assignment of pick-up times. Distribution was scheduled to take place from 8am to 4pm Monday through Friday and from 8am to 1pm on Saturday. Students were asked to sign up for a pick-up day and time. Sixty time slots per hour were available. Saturday was planned as a convenience for commuters who used public transportation to come on campus. It was felt they would have an easier time arranging special transportation on the weekend. As it turned out, Saturday was the first and only day to become totally reserved.

Students signed up for their pick-up time during the end of January. This was possible since it was unlikely that their class schedules would change between that time and the time when the computers would arrive (sometime before the end of the term). Students signed up for their desired day of the week and time of day. They were not given a specific date as the actual date of distribution could not be determined until the

manufacturer actually shipping the machines. This method had the advantage that students did not know which day of the week would be the first day of distribution. If they had known that Monday would be the first day, many students would have chosen Monday for that reason. As it was, students selected their times rather evenly across the week. Students were given approximately one week's notice as to what their actual pick-up date would be.

- At their scheduled pick-up time students entered a long hallway and formed a single line while waiting for their names to be called. General handouts and large posters reminding them of the papers they needed in order to receive their Macs were posted around the room.

- A "checker" verified the student's name, ID number, "color-coded" computer card, and assigned time. If everything matched, the checker crossed of the student's name and sent the student on to the flow manager. If there appeared to be a problem, the senior staff person was called to assess the situation. If a problem had to be resolved elsewhere on campus, the student was given a re-admission pass for immediate access back to this location.

- The flow manager gave each student an equipment checklist card and kept students at this point until a distributor/escort was available to lead the student through the actual pick-up process.

- When assigned to a new student, each distributor picked up a sealed carton containing both the Macintosh and accompanying software and took both the carton and the student to a checkout table. At this point each student, with the help of the distributor, was required to make a complete inventory of the contents of the carton. Each item on the checklist card given to the student had to identified. At this time the distributors also explained the contents and gave basic instructions for setting up the computer once the student got it home. The machines were not booted up at this time, since each had been bench-checked the previous week (see "Machine Check-Out," A 84-12 in this Working Paper

Series). If all was in order, the student was taken to the check-out desk. If any component was missing, the distributor tagged the carton with a note explaining the problem, set that box aside, and brought another sealed carton for inspection by the student.

- At the check-out desk the student presented the two-copy purchase agreement. The person at the desk entered on the purchase agreement the serial numbers of the CPU, mouse, and keyboard of the equipment given to the student. The student then signed the agreement and was given one copy. The other copy was filed. The student was then escorted to the exit desk.

- At the exit desk all computer cartons were tagged with a "paid" stamp.

- Upon leaving the building, students entered one of the many vans that were waiting to take them to dormitories or any of the various parking facilities on campus, including a number of special parking areas set up specifically for the distribution days.

Staff used for this process were ten distributors, one flow manager, 10 check-out clerks, two technical staff, two exit desk personnel, one accounting supervisor, and one general supervisor. Two guards were present at all times during distribution. A technical supervisor as well as a senior staff person from the Comptroller's Office were also available throughout distribution in order to handle any special problems that might develop. In addition, police were available for traffic control.

Staff estimated that 60 students could be processed per hour given the number of staff involved and the procedures specified above. However, the process worked so smoothly during the March 1984 distribution that an average of 80 students per hour could have been processed.

One last note. A visit to Stevens Institute, which had gone through a similar distribution process a few months before, convinced staff that a

repair service needed to be in place during the distribution process. This turned out to be a sound decision. The first repair request came in a few hours after distribution had begun. Overall, about 50 repairs were made during distribution. These were probably due to difficulities existing in the machines upon delivery but not caught during the University's basic check-out procedure. This number of repairs, in fact, did not presage a lot of repairs later on. In fact, by the end of 1984, when there were over 5,000 Macintosh computers on campus, only two and one-half persons were required to maintain these machines without any repair backlogs developing. In fact, the general rule for repair service on campus is "in by 11am, out by 4pm."